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ABSTRACT

This paper examines issues concerning mandated father involvement with their children, especially as this involvement affects children with special needs. The paper examines four points: (1) the history of the status of fathers, how it has changed, and why father involvement is an issue; (2) current regulations at the federal level which explicitly provide for or mandate father involvement; (3) court decisions which encourage or mandate father involvement with children having disabilities; and (4) implications for special educators of increased mandated father involvement. Two strands in current theories concerning mandated father involvement are noted: one which insists that father involvement is important and to be encouraged and the other which urges ultimate maternal control over child rearing. Four models of father influence on child development are compared: new dad, traditional dad, vestigial dad, and feared dad. A table identifies references in the Code of Federal Regulations concerning fathers' responsibilities. The almost exclusive emphasis in the law on the financial responsibilities of fathers is noted. Recent court decisions in various states concerning fathers of children with disabilities are summarized. Suggestions for encouraging more inclusive father involvement complete the paper. (Contains 38 references.) (DB)

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# Mandating father involvement: Implications for special educators

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Abstract

Fathers' roles and responsibilities have undergone immense changes, especially recently. However, despite considerable social change in how fathers are perceived, their legal responsibilities of providing economic support for their children and families, sometimes (if their children have disabilities) indefinitely, seems not to have changed much since classical times. Recently, some authors have argued that fatherhood itself is either an irrelevancy to child development or is positively hurtful to mothers and children. On the other hand, a number of other authors are suggesting that fathers have unique and valuable perspectives to offer and should be encouraged to be more involved with their children.

Selected citations from the Code of Federal Regulations, and descriptions of recent court decisions, which mandate father involvement on behalf of their children almost all stress the father-as-economic-provider, to the exclusion of virtually all other roles. The impact on special educators, who work with children who have delays or differences in development, is discussed and a number of suggestions for involving men and fathers in the educational world of their children are made.

## Introduction

Over the past few months and years, fathers and their roles with children have come under increased public scrutiny. A number of stories about the place of fathers have appeared in the popular literature (Shapiro, Schrof, Tharp, & Friedman, 1995; Blankenhorn, 1995b). In the professional literature, information about fathers, especially fathers in general (as opposed to fathers of children with disabilities) has been growing steadily, although fathers are still much less likely to be studied than mothers (Lillie, 1993). There is very little information about fathers of children with disabilities generally available, with a few exceptions (see May, 1991).

David Blankenhorn (1995a) has published a popular-press book on the changing roles of fathers which takes a critical look at the declining influence of biological fathers and of other male roles as they apply to fatherhood. Blankenhorn goes so far as to assert that the declining role of fathers is at least partly to blame for the breakdown of the inner city, among other social ills. This argument is not new: elements of it are at least thirty years old. In one form it calls for the "restoration" of males, especially minority males, as heads of families because families with "matriarchal" orientations were presumed to be contributing to the weakening of the family (see, Aldous, 1967, for example).

Fathers of children with disabilities often report serious stresses, due to the changing nature of their involvement with their children and because they may somehow feel they are failing in performing an important role as men and as fathers (May, 1991). Efforts have been made, with fathers in the general population, to

encourage father involvement with their children by means such as linking welfare and related services to such involvement. While some view this tactic as positive, since it encourages male involvement with their children (including, by extension, fathers of children with disabilities), others view such a mandate as threatening to women, since such policies can be viewed as increasing men's power at the expense of women.

This paper examines four points:

- What is the history of the status of the father? How has this changed and why is father involvement an issue?
- What current regulations (at the Federal level) explicitly provide for or mandate father involvement?
- What court decisions encourage or mandate father involvement with their children with disabilities? How?
- What are the implications for special educators of greater mandated father involvement?

## History of the father's role

The classical Roman father. The classical Roman concept of the paterfamilias is the system of Roman life in which the father of a family had control over his children from their conception until he, himself, died. In this system the father was presented with a child, at birth, and had sole legal authority over whether the child was to be accepted or "exposed." Acceptance of the child entailed a number of legal obligations on the part of the father. Therefore, a father's exposure of a child may be interpreted as his confession that he was unable to provide for his children. This confession was signalized by the child being placed. at a customary site (often in the local

marketplace), where those who could afford children would find them and take them home (Eyben, 1991).

While the power of fathers in this system might seem extreme to modern eyes, it was only one part of the responsibility a good Roman father had toward his children, especially his sons. Mothers also had their own responsibilities, though they were not nearly as powerful, in the eyes of the law as were fathers. Eyben (1991) sums up the differing responsibilities of parents by citing another author to the effect that: "A mother shows affection, a father judgment....(p. 117)" Ancient Roman fathers were expected to love their children, to be indulgent but not too indulgent, to be an example of virtue to their children and to their sons in particular and not to treat their children like slaves. The concept of a generation gap was recognized and it was also understood that young men (but not young women) often needed to sow their wild oats, so fathers (responsible for the behavior of their children) were expected to punish their sons only lightly for youthful peccadilloes.

The primary responsibility of the Roman father was training his son (and daughter) in such a way that they would grow up to be responsible adults. Good fathers were also expected to subordinate their own needs to the needs of their children. Fathers were also expected to worry about and work on creating a good future for their children, specifically in terms of worldly success and marriage. Finally, fathers were expected to protect their children and to provide for their future welfare to the extent they were able -- mothers, being generally forbidden to will property, were unable to perform this role (Eyben, 1991). The Roman father's responsibilities and expectations are, therefore, very similar to what we might call, today, the "traditional"

roles of fathers: provider, protector, and judge. To the Romans, then, the father was -- in law and in custom -- the final authority on almost all matters pertaining to the family, but also bore tremendous responsibility on behalf of his children.

The father in the Middle Ages. By the Middle Ages, the legal powers of the father had become more circumscribed. While the father was still the undisputed legal head of the family, the arrival of the principle of primogeniture meant that instead of providing for his children as individuals, the father was expected to provide for his family as a whole, in such a way as to ensure the prosperity of the family (represented by the eldest son) rather than the prosperity of each child, which had been the Roman method. What brought this about was a shift in law which prohibited the father from splitting his inheritance among his sons (and in a surprising number of places where that was legal or customary, his daughters). Families in the Middle Ages were often conceived of as economic associations headed by the males in the family. Since the continuation of families depended on male offspring, fatherhood became more important than ever as a means of organizing and advancing the family. On the other hand, the rights of the father as an individual were not as important as his role as head of the economic association which was the family (Gies & Gies, 1987).

In other areas, the father was supposed to ensure that the family remained religiously pure. In this regard, there are some recorded instances of fathers of "defective" children ordering those children to be killed, because such children were supposed to be evidence of sin on the part of the parent. Fathers were supposed to protect their families from sin and were therefore responsible for making these decisions (Gies & Gies, 1987).

Fathers in the Middle Ages had a host of other responsibilities to their families and its structure and continuance. For instance, Frances and Joseph Gies (1987) point out that a number of family functions, overseen by the father of the Middle Ages, have been lost to the modern family, such as family functions as "defense organization, political unit, school, judicial system, church, and factory" (p. 7).

The modern father's roles. In more modern times (about the last two hundred years), the role of the family and, importantly, the place of children, has changed. In Roman and medieval conceptions of the family, the strongly economic place it held was stressed and, in this way of looking at families, fathers were the economic heads, and social heads of their extended family groups. In this formulation children were important primarily in terms of economics: parents, especially fathers, who brought them into the world or who adopted them were entitled to their labor in return for resources expended in their upbringing. Still, even in this view, fathers were legally required to provide education and moral training to the children and others under their care. The state took little interest in what happened within a family, provided that the father maintained the family. However, from about the beginning of the 19th century the trend shifted from the legal paramountcy of the rights of the father to a more modern view in which the best interests of the child were paramount. As the welfare of the child became more important, the role of the mother as primary nurturer came to also be seen as more important. The father's role began to shrink as the presumption of the mother as most nurturing parent began to take hold legally (Mason, 1994). Other aspects of family life which had been controlled by fathers (e.g., deciding how much education children would receive) became part of what Mason calls the "modern child

welfare system" (p. xiv). This system has been in place from the early parts of this century until the present, with only one significant change. Presumptions of maternal custody in cases of divorce changed in the 1970s to favor a system organized around the principle of joint custody. The State also has supported single parenting and out-of-wedlock parenting by taking over the earlier father's responsibility of providing basic support for children. Finally, the rise of the women's movement has irrevocably changed the way father's rights are viewed (Mason, 1994).

Present-day fathers, then, seem to have lost the all-powerful position which had been theirs (in Western law) since classical times. This change has become most obvious over the past thirty years or so (see a recent article by Burstein, Bricher, and Einwohner [1995] which analyzes Federal legislative ideas about work, family, and gender, since 1945), and has led to a situations in which fathers who thought they knew what they were "supposed" to do with regard to providing for their families are now uncertain as to their roles. Blankenhorn (1995a) argues that fathers are no longer judged by whether or not they are performing roles traditionally (and as we will see, still legally) associated with fathering, such as being a good provider, or taking responsibility for the moral education of their children, but by whether or not they are good at what have traditionally been feminine roles, such as emotional support for children or other nurturing tasks.

Current theories. There appear to be two strands or threads in the literature: one insists that father involvement is important, normative, and should be encouraged, by means of court orders if necessary. The other strand insists that any attempt to involve fathers without the permission of mothers is simply a patriarchal trick, since it

reduces an area of power which mothers have always had control over, namely, child rearing. Information on these strands will be presented next.

## Mandating father involvement: is it a good idea?

Men, as fathers, have been assigned a number of roles by law and custom. The primary role, sometimes seen as encompassing all others is that of breadwinner/protector (see Aberg, Small, & Watson, 1977, for example). In this role, fathers are expected to provide financially for their children. In the past, the financial provision for the children would have been accompanied by a number of rights, having to do with control over the care and upbringing of his children. A role associated with that of financial provider is the role of husband: marriage has historically been an institution favorable to fathers because it legitimizes the family as an economic entity, of which he has historically been the head. However, when marriages break up, the father frequently loses control over the family to the mother (Meyer & Garasky, 1993) but is still expected to provide economically via paying child support.

Fathers are sometimes being encouraged (as opposed to mandated) to take part in more activities with or on behalf of their children, by some who see such involvement as positive. For example, Levine, Murphy, & Wilson (1993) have described a number of successful programs involving fathers and have provided a blueprint for father involvement. McBride and McBride (1993) also describe model programs for fathers which encourage men to be more involved with the nurturance of their children. More specifically, Manning (1983) noted that fathers want to be more involved with their children through parent conferences -- something previously left to mothers -- and suggests a number of techniques for making fathers welcome. In 1991, Rep. Pat

Schroeder, of Colorado, held a Congressional hearing on ways in which the workplace could be made more father-friendly, namely ways in which men could be encouraged to take part in child rearing activities. This is a new (to fathers) activity. These authors envision a strong and continuing role for fathers in ways which are not solely tied to the father's economic functions.

On the other hand, some authorities , notably Furstenberg and his associates (Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987, Furstenberg, 1990; Furstenberg & Harris, 1990) have seen the role of the father as generally small and getting smaller, since many fathers are absent fathers, and children seem to be(on the whole, according to these authors) getting along all right. This literature appears to suggest that there are few, if any, important roles for fathers. In addition to this literature about the perceived irrelevance of the father, there are a few authors who not only find fatherhood irrelevant but harmful to women and children. For example:

> The literature on child welfare is replete with references to children and families. The position taken [in this article] is that such references are inaccurate and blur the real issues which need attention. The focus should be on women and children.... While the social institution of child welfare may have been founded primarily by men...it is a system of, by, and for women.... (Miller, 1991, p.593).

and:

> The basic assumption of patriarchy is gender inequality: In the family ethic the role of a women is to be married, be economically dependent on a man, have children, provide unpaid care in the home, and provide low-paid labor in the marketplace (Miller, 1991, p. 594).

One of Miller's (1991) points is that a system of "public patriarchy," consisting of the state, the welfare system, and the media has taken over the "father-husband patriarchy of previous centuries in American history" (p. 594). This position is also found in other writings. For example, Pollock & Sutton (1985) write that:

> Fatherhood is the ideology and practice of the dominance of the senior male....It is the means through which male supremacy is self-perpetuated....Through fatherhood, girls are taught femininity -- the proper place of women subordinate to men, the art of loyalty and service to men, and a thorough disrespect for women. (p. 595).

These authors believe that any attempt to give fathers equal rights in involvement with childcare and other positions which have historically been those where women have been predominant and powerful is "a step backward on the road to sexual equality" (p. 598) because to do so enhances the rights and status of men at the expense of women.

Kraemer (1991), using an argument composed of comparisons of fatherhood in humans to fatherhood (or the lack of it) in animal societies, and of references to changes in religious beliefs from "mother-goddess" to "god-king", argues that fathers are doing nothing more than running a protection racket, at the expense of women and children. An interesting related article by Christensen, Dahl, and Rettig (1990), compared child support payments by non-custodial mothers to child-support payment by non-custodial fathers. These authors argue that, although women ordered to pay child support pay a smaller proportion of their total income (20% as opposed to 25% for men) in child support, this ought to be seen as a situation in which justice is being served. In this article the authors seem to be calling for unequal treatment for women

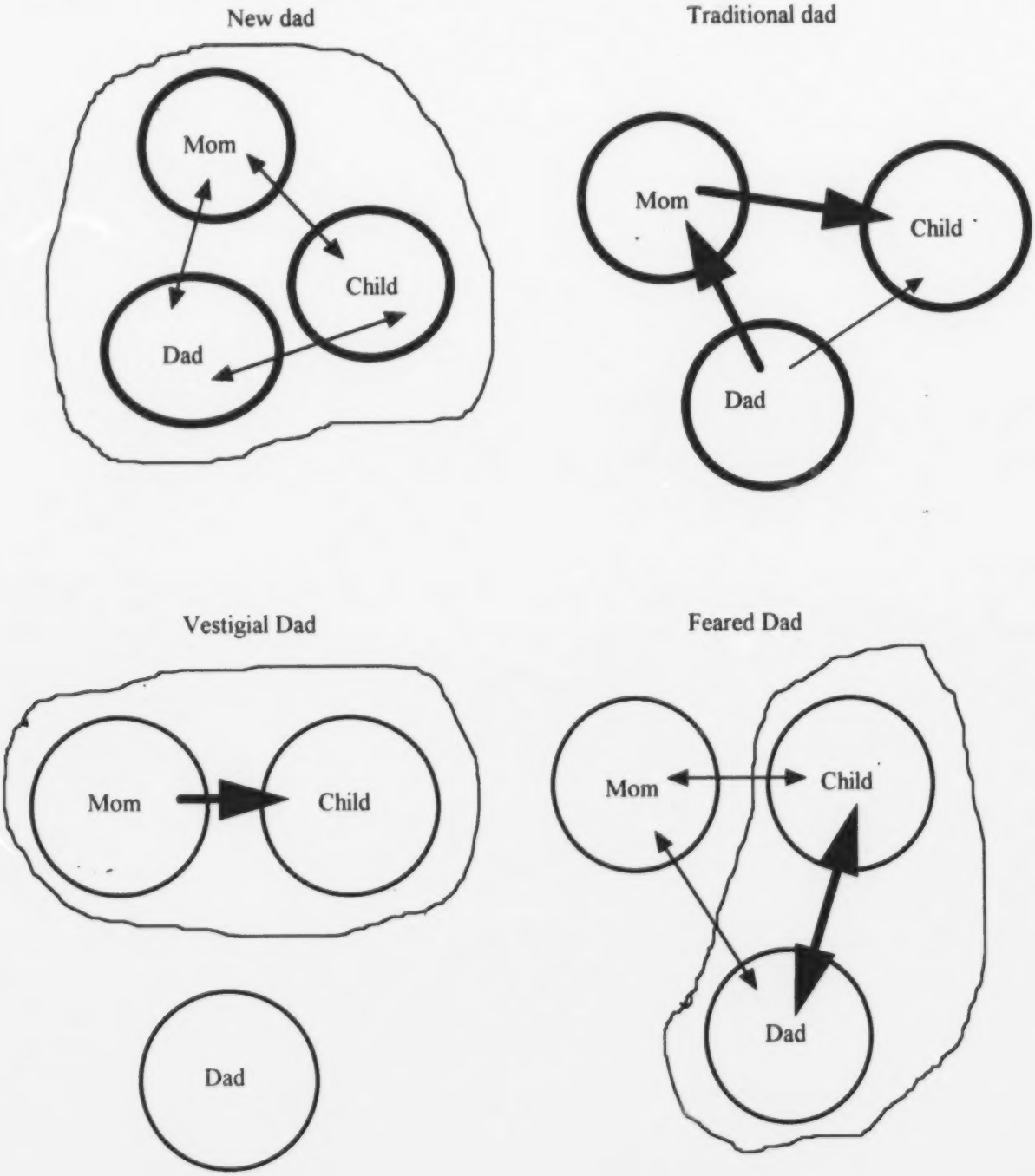
precisely because they are women (having been discriminated against, less likely to have pensions, and so forth), and therefore in need of "protection" by the courts. Kraemer's article is an attack on fatherhood for being a protection racket while Christensen, et al. seem to ask for that protection.

## Literature on the father's role in child development

I have conceptualized four main ways in which the literature seems to view fathers' influence on child development because that would seem to be an area of interest to special educators, because they deal with atypical development frequently. They are: Vestigial father, Traditional father, New father, and Feared father (see Figure 1). The Vestigial father is one who, though present in the home, has little, if any, influence on child development, while a Traditional father is one whose influence is mediated through and filtered by the mother (see Clarke-Stewart, 1978, for a review). The New father is one whose influence on his children is as important as the influence of the child's mother (Lillie, 1993), while the Feared father is one who is seen as having undue influence on child development, to the detriment of the mother (e.g., Kramer, 1991; Miller, 1991).

As has already been described, the history of fathers and their mandated or legal responsibilities to their children typically does not address issues of child development because that is apparently considered outside the field of law and legal responsibilities, where the majority of father's rights and responsibilities have lain. None of the father types I have mentioned appear to have much to do with the legal and social responsibilities and roles of father in an historic sense.

Figure 1: Four models of father influence on child development



Federal mandates for fathers

Law or policy which specifically mandates the involvement of fathers in any way with their children are rare, though not nonexistent. I have chosen to focus on Federal regulations (which are backed by and to all practical purposes have the force of law) because it is more likely that teachers and others involved with parents are more familiar with regulations than laws. Regulations are, in essence, the "rules" which define exactly what the rulemakers think Congress intended and are generally more understandable to teachers and to administrators. They are the day-to-day ways in which policy gets carried out. In the table, below, the references are to the Federal Code of Federal Regulations.

| Citation | Federal Mandate for Fathers (action or responsibility of the "father") |
|---|---|
| 32 CFR Sec. 584.5; 584.2 National Defense, Family support, custody, paternity | When a child born out of wedlock is applying for U.S. citizenship, the **father** of that child must legally acknowledge that child; requirement of soldiers (mostly male) to provide child support. |
| 41 CFR Sec 50.210 (In Appendix to Subpart B) | A **father** who wishes to father no more children must consent to his own sterilization. |
| 45 CFR Sec. 303.5 Public Welfare , Standards for Program | When needed, the **father** may be forced to submit to blood tests or other "medically acceptable genetic tests" which tend to identify a person as the father of a child or which |

| | |
|---|---|
| Operation: Establishment of Paternity | exclude that person as being a child's father. |
| 20 CFR 410.330 Federal Employees Benefits, Determination of relationships. | For certain purposes, the **father** or mother is the conduit through which legal eligibility for benefits runs, including such items as child support, survivors benefits, and so forth. This means that in order to be eligible for these benefits, fathers must be identified (if the child claims to be eligible because of father's or mother's acts). This may be accomplished by a court decision or by the father living with or contributing to the needs of the child. |
| 8 CFR Sec. 204.2 Aliens & Nationality, Immigant Petitions: Relative Petitions | When establishing paternity, it can be done by several means, including marriage, acknowledgment by the **father**, or court order. |
| 5 CFR Sec 870.901 Administrative Personnel, Federal Employee's Retirement System: Order of Precedence and Designation of Beneficiary | In order to legally inherit under Federal law, a child must be/have been somehow recognized by his or her **father**. This may take the form of a document, such as an affirmation of parenthood by the father, a birth certificate with the father's name appearing on it, or a court order establishing paternity. In cases of adoption, the "natural" father is replaced entirely by the adoptive parents. |
| 45 CFR Sec 506.3 | **Fathers** must affirm illegitimate children in order for them to |

| | |
|---|---|
| Public Welfare, War Claims Act of 1948, Gen'l Provisions. | receive benefits. |
| 38 CFR Sec. 3.59 Pensions, Bonuses, & Veterans' Relief | **Father** defined: in order to be a father, there must be an existing relationship which may be either biological or adoptive. |
| 32 CFR Sec. 818.17 National Defense, Personal Financial Responsibility: Paternity Claims. | Rules by which the Air Force establishes paternity (similar to others noted above) |
| | All citations from: http://www.house.gov, Searchable Code of Federal Regulations maintained by the U.S. House of Representatives. |

Federal regulations which specifically mention fathers still tend to virtually exclusively type fathers as important only in economic terms. The legal role and function of fathers (in these extracts) is to establish them as the persons normally responsible for providing support for their children (including U.S. citizenship). These citations do not suggest that fathers are the only people who can perform these duties, but they do essentially exhaust the mandated father roles according to the Code of Federal Regulations.

## Other suggested mandates for fathers

At this time, much public policy is in flux because of new political alignments in Congress and in the states. There are, however, a number of recent suggestions for mandated father. Many of these are in the "talking" phase, and some may never be implemented. However, they do represent some of the current thinking on the subject.

Paul Offner, legislative aide to Senator Moynihan of New York has, in a recent issue of "The New Republic" suggested a welfare reform in which the mother of a child on welfare has the choice of meeting a proposed work obligation in exchange for monetary support from the state by going to work herself in a public sector job, or choosing to have the father of the child go to work "in her place" (p. 14). The purpose of this policy suggestion is to reduce costs of publicly-funded items such as child care and Food Stamps. In addition, the author believes that such a choice would foster and strengthen the relationship between mothers and fathers because "he needs her so he can have access to a public job and to his children; she needs him to meet the work obligation so she can stay home with the kids" (Offner, 1995, p. 14).

In Sioux Falls, South Dakota, a father whose children missed too much school was fined and ordered to take responsibility for the future attendance of his children and threatened with jail if, in the future, his children were "even 30 seconds late for school in the future" ("Father fined", 1995, p. D1). The reason why the father was selected to bear this responsibility was unclear from the newspaper article, but in the traditional view, ultimate responsibility for the behavior of his children would rest with him as the father.

Recent court mandates

In 1991, a Florida appeals court ruled that the father of a child with extraordinary medical and psychological expenses should pay child support in the amount of $525 per month, $243 above the child support guidelines, which sum was intended to cover the costs of hospitalization and psychiatric treatment. The father had argued that his wife's financial position was better than his and that this order was an example of reverse sex discrimination, but the court rejected that argument (Silver v. Borelli, 1991, 16 MPDLR 59). In another case, in Iowa, a father who lost his child with mental retardation to therapeutic foster care (at least partly because the court found "strong evidence that the father physically abused the boy" [In re M.D.B, 1991, 16 MPDLP 60] was told he could regain custody upon completion of a parent training course and demonstrated ability to assume a parental role. In this case, the fitness of the father, not necessarily his economic function was important. In another case, in Minnesota, in 1991, adoptive parents of a child with disabilities were entitled to sue the adoption agency because it had misrepresented the physical and mental condition of the father -- stating he was healthy and of normal intelligence, when in fact he was hyperactive, of low-average intelligence, and had received counseling at a mental health center. The court felt that this information fell into the category of "health information" (M.H. v. Caritas Family Servs., 16 MPDLR 60, 1991) In this decision, the court apparently took an hereditarian view of the influence of a father. However, in a Montana case, the Supreme Court of that state found that the mental incapacity of a mother justified awarding sole custody to the father, with supervised visitation for the mother. There

was no mention of child support awards in the citation. (In re Marriage of Cook, 1991, 16 MPDLR 193).

An indication of the expectations some courts have of fathers can be found in a complex and complicated case from Virginia. In this case, a child with severe disabilities was placed in foster care and the parental rights of her parents were later terminated, at least partly because the parents shared a "paranoid system" which kept them from being able to provide appropriate care for their child. Although the father protested that he was not psychotic and that the court had improperly terminated his rights because of the actions of his wife, this argument was not accepted by the court, at least partly because the father had not, in the court's opinion, done anything about the conditions which led to the child's foster care placement (Helen W. v. Fairfax County Dept of Human Dev., 16 MPDLR 290, 1992). Although there is language in the citation holding both parents to account for failing in other areas, including repeated failure to comply with authorities, the father is specifically mentioned as being held responsible for conditions which the court thought should have been changed. This may have been because the father was found to be less impaired than his wife (who was found to be paranoid). However, the fact remains that it was his failure to perform a fatherly duty which was mentioned.

In South Carolina, a father who had failed to pay child support for a time because of depression over the death of his own father and subsequent substance abuse (alcohol) was protected from having his parental rights terminated. The appeals court decided that while the father's "failure as a parent" might be explained by his substance abuse, that was not a legal excuse for termination of his parental rights

(Dorn v. Criddle, 1991, 16 MPDLR 192). In this case, the court also apparently considered that there is more to fathering than simply money. However, in West Virginia, the Supreme Court of that state decided that the Social Security Disability benefits of a father could be applied to back child support, even though the father's failure to pay had been due to inability to pay. The court found "no evidence of bad faith or recalcitrance" on the father's part and characterized him as "a struggling blue collar worker, represented by free legal counsel, who was not hiding his income and had paid support promptly and in full when he could" (Farley v. Farley, 16 MPDLR 307, 1991). In this case, the court apparently operated on the assumption that a father has an apparently unlimited duty to provide for his children, even when he himself is disabled. Social Security benefits in a Montana case were allowed to stand in for child support because the benefits (paid to the father's disabled children on account of his blindness) were based on the father's disability. In addition, the Montana court, in this case, found that he did not have to pay future child support, since the disability-based payment exceeded his ordered support and the Social Security income available to his children would continue until the children reached the age of majority (In re Marriage of Durbin, 16 MPDLR 307, 1991). In Michigan, a similar ruling enabled a father to reduce his overdue child support payments by payment of his lump sum Social Security disability benefits to his wife (Frens v. Frens, 16 MPDLR 307-308, 1991). These were cases in which the father's disabling condition (and Social Security benefits) were used to provide child support payments to (apparently) nondisabled children. Still, courts found that disability was no bar to the responsibility of fathers to pay.

In Missouri, an appeals court ordered a father to pay child support beyond the age of 18 because his daughter (who lives with her mother and has "limited earning capacity") is "mentally incapacitated" and has been adjudicated as "an incapacitated person by reason of her mental condition." (In re Marriage of D.R.S., 16 MPDLR 192, 1991). In a similar Indiana case (Free v. Free, 16 MPDLP 192, 1991), a father of a 21-year-old son with physical disabilities was ordered to continue paying child support because Indiana law requires this "during the incapacity" of the child, regardless of age, unless changed by a court order. In another case with a similar outcome, a father with a disability (heroin addiction) who asked for reduced child support requirements in order to enable him to recover from his addiction was not excused. The court decided that the father's addiction was voluntary, that he should have known better and that to allow him a reduction in payments would "allow him to benefit from a self-inflicted disability to the detriment of his children" (McDermott v. Bender, 1990). However, a father in New York, who showed that his mental condition made it impossible to pay support (he claimed that his reaction to Prozac caused him to be unable even to have a casual conversation with a friend) had his support amount reduced. In this case, the court held that in addition to the father's statements, competent medical evidence that it was impossible for him to pay was also necessary (Smith v. Gayle, 16 MPDLR 621, 1992. A South Carolina court more than tripled the child support responsibilities of a father whose financial situation had improved, from about $400 per month to $1500 per month. The daughter was 20 years old at the time and has mental retardation (Peterson v. Smith, 16 MPDLR 429-430, 1992). Though some of these cases involve

fathers of children with disabilities rather than fathers of children with disabilities, it is important to note the depth various court rulings regarding the depth of the responsibility of the father to support his children.

## Summary

Federal policy and selected state court cases view fathers primarily from the point of view of their ability to provide support for their children, when mandating fathers to perform tasks or actions. In addition, there is some evidence that the character and even the physical health of fathers was taken by courts to be pertinent to their roles. There were no instances found of courts mandating other roles for fathers (such as spending time with their children, performing day care responsibilities, or being involved with other day-to-day activities), except for the father who was made responsible for getting his children to school on time. It appears from these cases that fathers are still expected to adhere to certain duties and fulfill certain legal roles, specifically responsibility for the actions of their family and financial support for their family, even when family members had reached the age of majority and support responsibilities might be expected to shift from the father to the child herself or to the state.

## Implications for special educators

Special educators and administrators who are interested in the role of the father and in finding ways to involve fathers with their children (assuming that such involvement is considered desirable) will be confronted by the following points, which will make such involvement of fathers an uphill struggle:

- Fathers' roles are confused, even to fathers
- Fathers are generally mandated to provide money for their children (in kind support does not appear to be mandated)
- Regulations and court cases mandating responsibilities for fathers don't typically address child care as one of their jobs.
- Fatherhood itself, as an important social role, is under attack .

Further, fathers are still likely, despite recent attention to their places in child development, likely to see themselves primarily as breadwinners and only secondarily involved in other tasks on behalf of their children (Lillie, 1991).

## Suggestions for action and research

First, special educators should make sure that fathers know that their input is valued and important: they ought to be welcomed if it is desired that they be involved with their children. Suggestions or ideas for specific father-friendly activities can be found in works by a number of authors, the desire to involve fathers must be genuine and, more importantly, must seem genuine as well.

Second, there should be affirmative action programs to include and involve fathers, including action which encourages men to enter special education, and related areas, as teachers, direct service workers, and as child care providers, in addition to their parental responsibilities to provide economically for their children. These programs should have at least two parts: traditional pre-service programs offering college and university training to men, and a public relations program encouraging men to enter these professions. Part of the public relations program should concentrate on public awareness over potential child abuse by men (and women, for

that matter), but should stress that while most identified abusers may be men, not all men are abusers. Father-run programs at the early childhood age and beyond, under the aegis of educators and day-care providers are a first step.

Third, special educators and administrators should recognize that fathers themselves will be viewed with some suspicion by the (mostly) female teaching corps in special education, if only because the special educators' world is female-dominated and threatening to men who may want to become involved (Gallagher, Beckman, & Cross, 1983). Encouraging men to become involved in appropriate ways may not be easy, and some men may not wish to become involved in activities for which they feel others may have more expertise. However, work in this area can encourage men to take responsibility for part of the education of their children with disabilities (whether or not they live with their children) and can provide special educators with a new source of support.

Fourth, special educators and administrators should recognize that much research (including local research) needs to be done on what roles fathers may want to have and what roles are appropriate for them in the special education classroom or related areas. Advocacy roles may be better suited to the legal and social roles of some fathers. These may entail: encouraging fathers to fulfill their responsibilities by contacting legislators, advocating for services, and performing similar tasks. In this regard, however, it may be that fathers will also need to be assured that their actions on behalf of their children will gain them the opportunity to influence how their children learn. This may be accomplished by having fathers involved with selecting and developing curricula and with finding innovative ways to include them in the education

of their children. Also, father involvement may vary, especially in terms of family life cycle: fathers may, for example, wish to be less involved with very young children, but still be willing to work with older children. Values and activities important to men need to become part of the Individualized Education Plan process: teaching a child how to change the oil in a car may be just as important to fathers and their children as teaching a child to read or to perform an academic skill or specific social skill. In this regard, recruitment of fathers onto local interagency councils may be a way to encourage them to become involved.

## Conclusion

Eliane Aerts (1993) writes:

> The judicial system has significantly contributed to the erosion of fatherhood. Through most of the court decisions on reproductive rights, judges have favored female as against male progenitors. They have upheld the rights of women to abort fetuses without consulting the father, the maternal rights over embryos, and they favor biological mothers over biological fathers in contested surrogacy contracts. Child custody settlements in recent years have added up to taking away the rights but trying to enforce the responsibilities of paternity....Is there a meaningful place for the father in the new familial institution? (p. 20)

Aerts notes that families are much more likely to be built around women these days and wonders about the long-term effects of such a sea-change. Aerts also calls for bringing the fathers back into the institution of the family, because fathers are needed. Special educators also ought to consider ways in which men, as fathers, can be "brought back in" to the educational lives of their children with disabilities.

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